

WASHINGTON, DC- Republicans failed to pass an unemployment extension that includes people whose benefits expired just before Christmas. The Republican leadership turned away proposals to extend the benefits prior to the holidays so people out of work at Christmas lost out. This new proposal extends benefits to people currently drawing benefits, but those people whose benefits expired -- even just a week ago - are left out of this extension. House Democrats were not permitted to offer an alternative proposal or amend the bill, despite their unity behind a more comprehensive unemployment benefits packages.

Congressman Earl Blumenauer released the following statement on the measure:

"I am saddened that the first major action of Congress will begin with a flawed process. One can only hope that this is not a sign of things to come with the Republican leadership at the helm of both chambers. Over 20,000 workers in Oregon alone were affected by the failure of Congress to pass this extension last session. These people deserve our best, not the lowest common denominator of benefits that the Republican leadership has decided it has to offer.

"Furthermore, the Republican leadership is not even allowing debate to occur on more reasonable options, instead choosing to limit the democratic process. The Democratic alternative would have provided for 26 weeks of extended unemployment benefits, helping nearly 2.5 million Americans over the next six months, while the Republican proposal only offers 13 weeks. In addition, this legislation will do nothing for the 1 million Americans who already have exhausted all of their state and federal benefits. While I am grateful for my jobless constituents that an extension will now be implemented, it is too little and too late.

"Extending unemployment insurance is the fastest way to help the people that need it most, since it provides targeted and effective economic stimulus. These critical benefits increase consumer spending in the hardest-hit areas and sustain and strengthen economic recovery. It makes more sense to invest in expanded unemployment benefits now to help millions of Americans, than exploding the budget deficit with President Bush's economic stimulus plan which will cost almost \$850 billion, including debt service, and whose own economists say will create less than 200,000 jobs."